TWIN CITY LINES
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P. O. Box 14467 University Station
Minneapolis, MN 55414-0467
(952) 922-1096
www.trolleyride.org

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Editorial staff

Aaron Isaacs
Editor

3816 Vincent Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55410
612-929-7066
aaronmona@aol.com

Sandra Bergman
Production Editor

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The Minnesota Streetcar Museum operates the Como-Harriet Streetcar Line in Minneapolis and the Excelsior Streetcar Line in Excelsior. Its mission is to preserve Minnesota's electric railway heritage.

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MINING THE TRIBUNE

-Aaron Isaacs

For a Twin Cities streetcar historian there are many information resources, but one of the best has been the hardest to access—until recently. Daily newspapers have everything one could want in the way of fine-grained you-are-there information. Newspapers are available on microfilm at the Minnesota Historical Society, but they aren't indexed, and that's a huge problem. Sitting at a microfilm viewer for endless hours trying to find streetcar stories was too much for me. I couldn't do it.

Thankfully, technology has come to the rescue. Historic newspapers are starting to become available online and free through the local public library websites. And the best news of all is, they're keyword searchable. Locally, the Minneapolis Tribune is available from 1867 to 1922. Russ Olson and I are now like the proverbial kids in the candy store. I've started to use the material in this magazine, in the Linden Hills issue and last issue's State Fair and streetcar conductor articles. What follows is a sampler of what has surfaced. Hope you enjoy it.

ATTEMPTS AT INNOVATION

Periodically a new invention would be tested on the cars, soon to be heard from no more.

Apr. 8, 1904
Motormen May Wear Spring Heel Shoes Soon

Two motoneers on the old Interurban line were balancing jauntily on a pair of new jar eradicators yesterday. Not satisfied with the arrangements which the Twin City Rapid Transit Company has provided for their comfort, a number of the motoneers are experimenting with a new shoe, which it is expected will make their work much less tiresome.

The device offers a coarse sole about three-quarters of an inch thick which goes under the ball of the foot and a heel, which sits on two spiral springs. Numerous inquisitive persons who peered through the cab windows thought the motoneers were mounted on roller skates.

The street car men say the springs take off all the jar of the car and relieve the tension on the spine. An effort will be made to have the street car company take up the matter and provide all motormen with the new device.

July 24, 1898
An Electric Banjo

One of the striking features of the new observation tourist cars on the street railway system is an electric banjo, which plays popular music in a way that would put to blush a professor of the banjo. It has an upright position in a glass case at the front of the car, and will play when baited by a nickel.

It has a repertoire of all the popular airs and furnished splendid music for the runs over the tourist lines.

Mar. 24, 1909
Megaphone Callers in Minneapolis Cars

Street car conductors in the Twin Cities will no longer have to take lessons in voice culture to enable them to call out to their patrons the names of the streets. That form of higher education will be kept exclusively for the motorman if an experiment which is at present being tried in two of the interurban cars proves successful.

Following an experiment made recently and for the first time at Topeka, Kan., a megaphone will be installed in the cars with a transmitter directly in front of the motorman. Without disturbing in the least his equilibrium, he will be able to call into it the names of the streets which an apparatus placed conveniently in the center of the car will echo to the passengers.

As it is claimed that the motorman is in a position to know the streets better than the conductor, chances for passengers over-riding their destinations are likely to be less frequent. Moreover it will enable the conductor to give more of his time to the financial part of his work, a decided advantage from the company's point of view, and also to the dispensing of those little courtesies which only a "con" knows of. It is stated that several of the motormen in the Twin City lines have already begun taking singing lessons, and that the change is likely to add materially to the list of local entertainments.

Front Cover: Streetcar ridership in the Twin Cities peaked in 1920, yet the system continued to add new track until 1933. Included was a new entrance to downtown Minneapolis over the newly constructed 3rd Avenue bridge. Something has delayed traffic and the Bloomington-Columbia Heights streetcar line. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.
Inside front cover: The Bloomington Avenue line was extended across Minnehaha Creek in 1928. Nine years later this aerial photo shows a new neighborhood with numerous vacant lots and few trees, but every house has a garage, bad news for TCRT. A Bloomington streetcar has just crossed the creek. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

HALLOWEEN

When searching for one thing, it's not uncommon to stumble onto surprising stories that are too good to pass up. These Halloween prank stories qualify.

Nov. 1, 1918
Halloween Pranks Varied And Numerous

Minneapolis Street Railway officials reported a trying night and in several instances schedules were disrupted on account of greased or soaped rails. At Xerxes avenue and the beginning of the company's right of way some ingenious lads "froze" a switch point by pouring hot lead into the frog. Traffic was tied up for 30 minutes while the crew of a Como-Harriet car dug out the hardened lead.

Trolleys were yanked from the wires and darkened street cars glided along darker streets where arc lights and lamp posts had been extinguished by mischief makers. Police scouting parties, in automobiles, would be rushed to one neighborhood only to learn or hear of a more daring deed in a section far removed from where they were.

Oct. 31, 1897
Halloween Royally Celebrated by the Minneapolis Boys

At 23rd Ave. N. and Emerson the boys transplanted a 40-foot section of sidewalk from the boulevard to the middle of the street. At 6th Ave, N. they removed a portion of the sidewalk and placed it on the street car track. At Hennepin Avenue and Lake Street the boys made trouble for the street cars by pulling the trolley poles off the wires. Several cars were pelted with rocks and stones and numerous windows were broken. An elderly woman who was riding in one of the cars was struck on the head by a decayed squash.

Nov. 1, 1898

At the end of the Plymouth Avenue street car line the entire switch was taken up and carried away. At 15th Avenue S. and 9th Street a large timber was placed on the track twice. On Washington Avenue SE the Interurban tracks were greased.

Nov. 1, 1900

On the Interurban line torpedoes were placed on the rails and in several cases boys threw small bags of flour into the rear vestibule. These burst and covered the conductor and the unfortunate passengers who happened to be standing on the rear platform.

The Lake Minnetonka line hosted its first unexpected passengers.

Sept. 29, 1905
Bride Takes Wonderful Ride Over the New Excelsior Streetcar Line

The glorious possibilities of the new Excelsior line of the Twin City Rapid Transit Company—all except the bridge—are known to the good people of Excelsior, or will be as soon as the wedding guests who made a trip over the line are permitted to circulate their story.

Miss Belle Stanley of Minneapolis and C. B. Raitz of Excelsior were married Wednesday in the big town, and a large party of friends attended the wedding and volunteered their services in transporting the bride safely to her new home in Excelsior. They thought a trolley ride over the new line would be quite the nicest thing in the world, so they took the matter to General Manager Hield. Mr. Hield's face glowed with pleasure as he recounted the manifold attractions of the line, but he whispered to the bridegroom that the bridge over the railway tracks at Hopkins was—well—not finished. "I'll send her home in a carriage," said Mr. Hield, gallantly. "No, give us one of your finest cars to Hopkins, and after that we'll take whatever is in sight, " said Mr. Raitz.

The only obstacle in the way was the bridge, but the happy couple and their friends said they would walk around it, and they did.

On the other side, Mr. Hield drew up with his very best accommodations, a work car with the right end pointing the wrong way. It was the best he could do. The car had been tidied up as much as possible, so that the ladies' gowns would not get soiled.

The motorman pulled out for Excelsior, and was compelled to run his car backwards, but that did not prevent him from making the trip in exactly 30 minutes.

MORE ON CONDUCTORS

There wasn't room for all the good conductor stories in the last issue, so here are some more from the Minneapolis Tribune.

Nov. 7, 1909
Conscience Fare Bane to Car Conductors

"I suppose that man thought he did me a favor when he rushed out here on the back platform and informed me, in a loud voice, that I had forgotten to collect his fare," said a conductor on the St. Paul and Minneapolis car to a Tribune man last evening. "Once in a while we miss a passenger in collecting the fares, but it can't be helped. We all make mistakes."

"Where does the passenger's mistake come in?" asked the reporter.

"Well it may be that a spotter is on the car and if he learned that I had overlooked a fare a report would be made to the company and my stock would not go up any. The passenger might have kept mum about it and the company would have gotten the nickel later anyway.

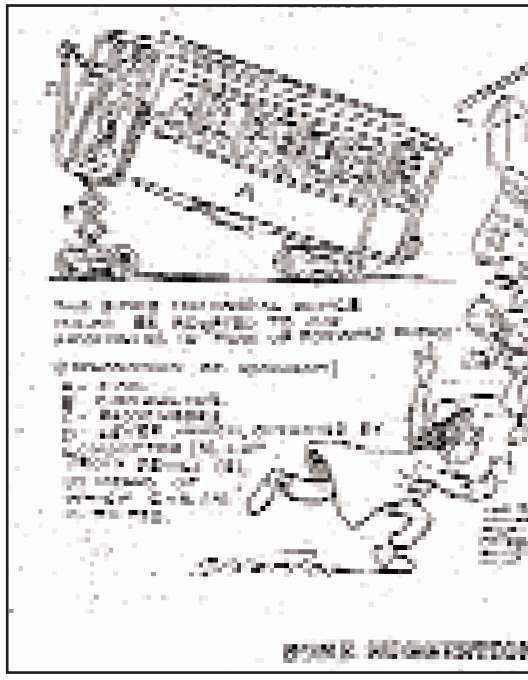
"I really don't think he meant anything by it. Perhaps he belongs to that class which even has scruples against defrauding the company to the extent of a nickel. Nevertheless he placed me in a bad position and at the same time thought he had done me a favor."

Dec. 3, 1894
Riding on the Rear

"Please move up front, gentlemen," says the conductor. But the passengers have heard the same remark before many a time and have gotten all over the notion of paying attention to it.

So the car moves on and several persons who were standing at the crossing wishing to board the car give up the idea and are waiting for the next one, while at the front end of the car which has passed there are empty seats and standing room is available.

Just what it is that is so attractive about the rear end of a street car is hard to determine, but that humanity gravitates toward that part of the car as surely as water runs downhill may be observed on almost any car which is well filled. The street railway company



has made frequent efforts to relieve the congested condition of their back platforms, and their conductors have standing instructions to allow no one to stand outside the car door except those who are smoking. It is not to be inferred that the street railway magnates are in a pool with the tobacconists and put a premium on smoking for that reason. Their real reasons for desiring to keep the rear platforms clear are very much more direct and practical than that. In the first place a great many of the claims for damages brought against the company arise from the fact that persons have received injuries by falling from platforms when cars are rounding curves, or from some circumstance which would not have affected the individual had he been inside the car.

The travelling public is inconvenienced, and a great deal of their valuable time is lost, by having to crowd through groups of men who pack the small space between the steps and the door of the car.

The word of the street car conductor is not without authority. But watch him as he strains to get around some man of mighty girth who completely fills the space between the door of the car and the steps. Imagine his inner ravings as the portly passenger plants himself a little more firmly in the common path and grunts out his determination to stay there.

On the whole, the smoker seems to have rather the best of it. No matter how numerous he may be, nor how much room he may take up, it is not his fault. No one can complain against him, for he would not be allowed to go inside if he chose to. It would not be fair to ask a man to give up a 10 cent smoke for a 5 cent ride.

Jan. 19, 1908
An Afternoon with the Streetcar "Cons"

"Do you want to come in contact with the public and learn the faults and foibles of the people?" That is what one of the gray-coated fellows who ring up fares confided to me as I boarded his

During the first two decades of the 20th Century, streetcar ridership grew faster than TCRT could accommodate it. Witness these cartoons from 1905 and 1920, which reflected the riding public's frustration.

Washburn Park and Camden Place car at the transfer intersection the other afternoon.

The usual big crowd for the lumber suburb was on board, and it was some time before he returned to the rear platform, where I waited to ask him some of his reasons for drawing such a conclusion."in the first place", said he, "no less than three pieces of bad money and six over-time transfers were shoved out to me on this very load, and there was the usual number of people who tried to escape paying altogether. You know people who are honest about nearly everything else think it all right to beat the street car company if they can, when they are beating us fellows instead, for we have check up for it all. Sometimes I have made up a shortage from 50 cents to $1 on a day's run"

"How about the conductors beating the company" I ventured cautiously. "You know we hear so many stories about the fellows who give the company a chance by tossing a nickel up to see if it will stick on the bell cord,

A crowded rear platform, the conductor's bane.

deciding if it sticks it goes to the company and to themselves if it falls."

"Well," he replied seriously, "I would not sell my job for 5 cents. Two lady spotters caught a couple of fellows just the other day. They were called to the office and relieved of their numbers without a word of explanation, but they knew why."

The car was empty by the time we reached the end of the line, and as we started back I was all alone with the ads for pills and soaps and breakfast foods. But at the next corner a "con" going to work came on board and I hastened to make his acquaintance.

He told me he was a new man, that until three months ago he had never known anything but work on a farm. He confessed he preferred taking fares and calling streets to plowing corn and feeding hogs, but his frank recital of his initiation told of many early discouragements.

"Well, I was about sick of it that first week, all right," he laughed. "It seemed as though the bells and the gates and the transfers and the people who kept asking me, 'We ain't got there yet, have we?' would drive me wild. But the work is simpler now and I would hate to lose my job. A big percentage of the conductors come from the farms, I think, being attracted by the change afforded. But there was so much to think of at first it was hard work, and then a new man is apt to lose his head with a big load."

We were at the intersection again, and I was just in time to catch an Oak and Harriet car. It was an entirely different sort of crowd, and it was evident that they were returning to homes in the better residence part of the city. We clanged through the crowded part of Hennepin Avenue, past the West Hotel, the library and Loring Park before the conductor was at leisure to talk. He had been on that line for 12 years.

"It has all got so old to me that it is simply monotonous work now", said he, "and yet there isn't a day when some incident occurs to lend new interest. Of course, I deal with the better class of people in the city and never have to haggle over fares as they do on some lines. My passengers are of the sort who, if they are wrong, want to make it right, and if they are right it is no use to argue, for they know. On some lines if the conductors didn't look out they wouldn't get anything. Having been on this run so long I am personally acquainted with many of the patrons and they miss me if I lay off for a few days and are sure to ask me where I have been."

At this juncture a fat man came through the gates. He had not been at the corner when the car approached and the motorman had gone on, to stop a rod or two beyond, when he called.

"Ain't you got no eyes?" flashed the fat man. The conductor didn't say anything and only smiled and looked the other way when the portly gentleman was safe in his seat.

"That's always the way," he said. "If there was anyone to blame it was the motorman, but the conductors catch it."

"It wasn't much like this when I began work on this line," said the conductor as we swung around at 44th Street. "It was nothing but woods and there was only one little hut over there on the hill. Lake Harriet over there brings business during the summer Sundays and evenings, when people come just for the sake of a trolley ride. The breezes off these lakes are great."

"Does being a conductor pay?"

"Well, I am raising a family of five children," he answered. "I have been at this so long I don't suppose I could do anything else. We are paid enough to save if we are frugal."

When I got back to the intersection I had to jam my way with people going home from work on a Minnehaha car. It swung down past the post office, out by the depots and into that section of town where the working class lives. It was impossible to get a seat and the worn-out workers were a bit irritable. Dinner pails and lunch boxes told of an entire day away from home, spent in many instances at tasks uncongenial.

It was not until I was returning from the Minnehaha Falls, now frozen, that I had an opportunity to talk to the fare-taker.

"Do you know," said he, "that after a man has been a conductor for awhile he knows at once by the look on a man's face whether he has paid his fare on not? I have to look pretty close, and sometimes a fellow will drop into a seat and absorb himself in a paper to lend the appearance of having been on the car for hours. But when he looks up I can tell. If I acted uncertain for a second he would try to bluff me out.

Occasionally a drunken man gives me a little trouble and I have to oust him. Riding on a car will make a partially intoxicated man worse, you know. I have to look out for bad money. It is common for people to say, when they get a lead nickel, 'Well, I guess I'll have to pass it off on the street car.'

"Fair time is when we conductors have our troubles," he said. "The cars are crowded then with farmers who don't know where they are going. It wouldn't be so bad if they would ask us questions, but they repeat them every time we pass, fearing we have forgotten."

Riverfront, depots and the heart of the city again. At the intersection there are hordes hungry for out-going cars. Each of the electric illuminated, yellow cars has its numbered conductor.

They work on long shifts. They are, as a rule, courteous and obliging. And after spending the afternoon with them I am convinced they have far more to do that collect and register fares

EJECTMENTS

As long as there has been public transit, there have been conflicts between the crew and passengers. It may be as trivial as a dispute over the fare. It may involve public intoxication,

or an argument between passengers. In every case, it fell to the crew to resolve the issue, and often that meant removing the disturbing party from the streetcar, an ejectment. In the days of two-man crews and fewer lawyers, the odds were more in favor of the crew. The museum's collection includes rulebooks from every era and it's interesting to see what changed and what stayed the same over the years.

St. Paul City Railway, 1888

"Should any passenger behave with gross impropriety, or refuse to pay the fare:

1. Stop the car at street crossing, if practicable.
2. Politely request passenger to leave the car, stating reason.
3. If passenger refuses, summon a police officer, if one is in sight.
4. Or, in the absence of an officer, expel the passenger, using no more force than is absolutely necessary."

In another section, the book added, "…but on no account eject passenger while car is in motion."

In 1891, the Minneapolis Street Railway's rule book added this bit of legal wisdom, "Never eject a passenger from car for non-payment of fare or disorderly conduct unless you have the names and addresses of one or more reputable witnesses to sustain you."

Further clarification appeared in the 1917 TCRT rulebook: "When a conductor decides that it is necessary to make an ejectment, he shall first call the motorman back, and the passenger to be ejected shall be carefully assisted, not thrown or kicked, down the steps to the ground.

Force shall only be used when it becomes absolutely necessary.

Before forcibly ejecting a passenger who presents a defective transfer, conductor shall use every means to persuade him to leave car without assistance. However, if the passenger or someone else for him offers to and does pay a cash fare after the ejectment has been started, passenger shall be allowed to ride.

Conductor must eject any person who, after being warned to stop, continues to use profane language, or who fights or offers to fight on car, or who is otherwise disorderly to such an extent as to annoy, frighten or endanger other passengers. Conductor shall not wait for other passengers to complain, but shall see that order is maintained." It added that spitting on the floor was not an ejectable offense.

The same general rules remained in effect through the end of streetcar service. The 1950 rulebook added this extra chore: "If a disorderly person is ejected his fare must be returned to him and notation made on the trip sheet to this effect."

REMINISCENCES OF MINNEAPOLIS'S STREETCAR ERA

-Don Olsen

During the 1930s I was a teenager living in the south side of Minneapolis, which was served by the Nicollet Avenue line; one of the most heavily traveled in the city. From my youngest years, I was fascinated by streetcars. Following are some of my memories (which may be imperfect) of growing up with the big yellow cars.

By the late thirties I was deemed responsible enough to travel by myself on the cars. On Saturdays I mapped out routes I wanted to see, and planned an "itinerary". Car destination signs were an invitation to explore—where was the North West Terminal, or "Monroe" of Grand-Monroe, or "Johnson" of Bryant-Johnson?

Within a few years I had ridden on every line in the city. Tokens were six for 45 cents, transfers free. Often when I reached a line's terminus, the conductor would call out, "end of the line, this is as far as we go." Most were very friendly, and when I explained that I was only riding to see the line, they allowed me to return without paying again.

When the south Bryant line was extended across Minnehaha Creek, we used to bike the several miles to the site to watch the bridge construction. When it became obvious that the deck was only going to be wide enough for streetcars, we were quite baffled. A story circulated that since the city refused to pay for a full sized crossing, TCL decided to go it on their own. In retrospect, it's difficult to believe that the cost of the bridge was ever recovered from the farebox.

Minneapolis weather extremes made the well-built cars havens in rain, snow and/or cold. Storm windows were installed in the fall, and vestibule pocket doors and under-floor heaters (which supplanted the Baker stoves) kept passengers snug and warm. The cars were meticulously maintained, and there was usually a faint smell of varnish inside.

Either front seats or rear platforms of the gate cars were my positions of choice. Smoking was allowed on the open platform, and although even as a youngster I disliked the odor, it was a great place to hear track and gear sounds and smell the ozone.

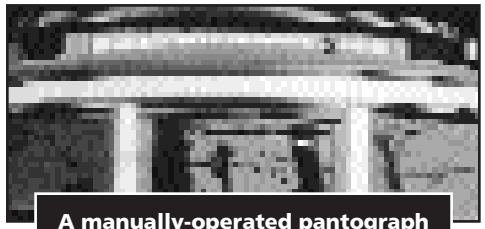
After the "cab" was opened up—in the conversion to a full front entrance, a front seat had the attraction of seeing where we were going, of course, but it also offered the opportunity to watch the motorman in action—working the big K-type controller and the brake valve.

There was frequent clanging of the gong to warn errant pedestrians and motorists, and all too infrequent use (for this kid) of the air whistle. On occasion, when a delivery truck or carelessly parked auto blocked the tracks, the motorman would repeatedly pull the whistle lanyard to summon the offending driver to move his vehicle.

Over the years, there were many improvements, such as replacing the gates with air operated doors. Before this updating, the motorman operated the gates mechanically with a large crank on the right side of the cab, connected to the gates by under-floor rodding. When the "motorman's door" at the front was replaced by a narrow set of steps and folding doors, the operating crank was rebuilt with a button extending out of the top. To open the front ("exit only") door, the motorman depressed the button, which engaged the front doors.

As young as I was in the early thirties, I recall, and thought it was strange, that there was no windshield wiper. In heavy, wet snows, the motorman had to get out, stand on the fender, and brush the windows off. The first crude wiper was a mechanical gizmo here the blade was operated by pantograph levers—much like the extension to hold upright phones. It was operated by a big lever at the top of the window. Later, in the late thirties, regular pneumatic wipers were installed.

Another improvement for motormen's convenience were pneumatic ice scrapers (I'm not sure this is the proper terminology). These were the spring-mounted steel blades on the front truck which could be depressed with a lever to scrape the track and remove impacted ice and snow. I don't remember if they were



A manually-operated pantograph windshield wiper.

hand or foot operated, but were improved by air-operated scraper blades. They made a lot of noise, and it was fun to watch the snow fly out from the scrapers.

Prior to electric switches, the motorman stopped just short of the switch, disembarked and used a switch iron to flop the points over. In some of Minneapolis' more inclement weather, this was not a pleasant task. Cutting two oval holes in the cab floor, directly over the rails made the motorman's life easier. A pivoted cover could be slid over the hole in winter. It has a notch to clear the switch iron, which hung in the hole when not in use.

For some reason, when ascending the hill on Nicollet between 48th and 50th Streets southbound (which certainly wasn't the steepest), the main breaker occasionally tripped. It was located high up on a panel behind the motorman, and the first time it let go, with a loud "BANG", this ten or eleven year old nearly wet his pants!

After all these years, I suppose it's safe to relate another "hill story". One Halloween we scrounged some used motor oil from a service station and swabbed the rails on the grade on the north side of the Nicollet Avenue bridge over Minnehaha creek. Even at night, the line had frequent headway, and in a short time a number of cars were stranded—unable to obtain traction on the greased rails. Finally cars on the dry rail were able to push cars over the greased section. Our prank succeeded beyond our wildest expectations, and when a bevy of cops and firemen arrived, it scared the dickens out of us!

The Twin City Lines had a well-deserved reputation for the high level of maintenance of its equipment and physical plant. Cars were completely rehabbed every five years—stripped down, cleaned, mechanically and electrically renewed and upgraded. As kids do, I had my "favorite" cars, and I remember seeing one such car with a big scrape along the side—obviously a no-clearance encounter with a vehicle. Just a week later I rode in the same car, and the offending damage was sanded smooth and covered by a fresh coat of paint.

Trackwork was meticulously maintained. Much street trackage had welded joints. The Nicollet and Lake intersection was almost a grand union, and when renewal was required, large sections which had been pre-assembled were brought to the site in the wee hours of the night by work motors and put into place. I think TCL was a pioneer in this procedure. I found it disturbing because I enjoyed the clatter and bounce of the car as it negotiated the older special work.

Southbound on Nicollet, there was a small down grade past 38th Street, and near the bottom was a swale, caused by unstable substrate. The entire street and sidewalks had a big "wowee" in it. I always hoped there would be no passengers getting off so we could roar down the grade and lurch through the offset. Much to my disgust, several times a year track crews would be out to realign the tracks.

There were many grade crossings with railroads in the city. TCL took great care to avoid accidents involving trains. Conductors got off the cars to make certain the way was clear.

Many of the crossings were narrowed to single track, and a "net" covered the trolley wire. It was hot, and should there be a dewirement, it would catch the wheel and allow the car to continue past the crossing.

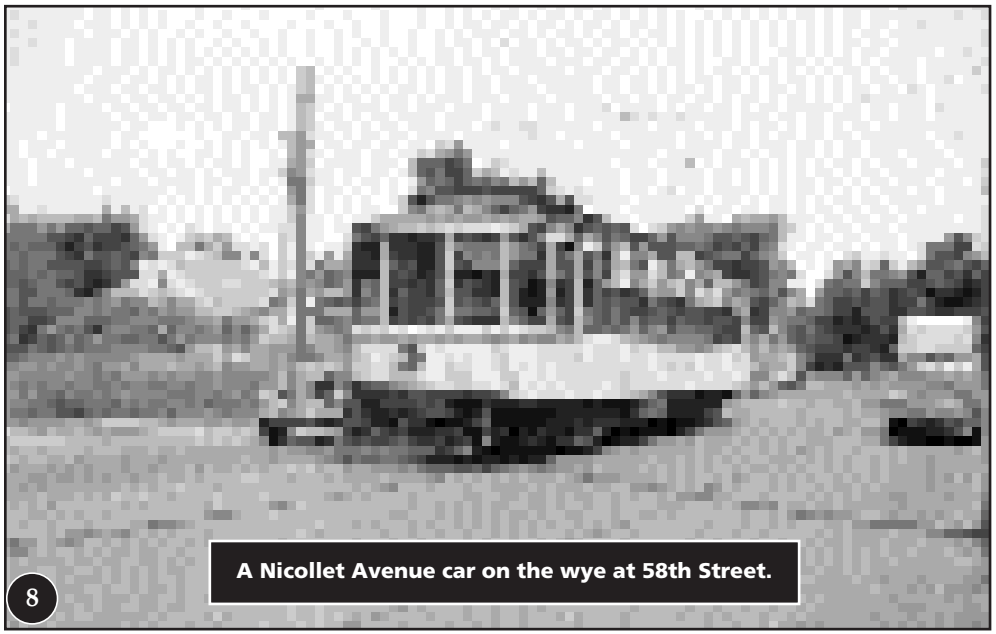
Line extensions or major track repairs required use of portable cross-overs. We called them "grasshoppers", for some obscure reason, and it was fun to bounce over them. If the detour was of some duration, a connecting trolley wire with frogs was installed over the temporary cross-over. If it was only a matter of a few days, the car was followed by a tender on the ground, and he yanked the pole off the wire after the motorman shut off, and then replaced it on the other side after the car coasted over the transition.

I have always found work equipment especially fascinating. TCL had a large stable of cars, ranging from cranes to shingle truck "shifters". At night I recall they used blue dasher lights, as warnings, I guess. In the late thirties, a program was inaugurated to replace the pavement between the rails with concrete. A huge mixer on flanged wheels was towed along the track after the pavement or cedar blocks (blocks of cedar were placed on end to form a road surface, much like cobblestone, only smoother. Heavy rains caused problems when the blocks loosened and floated away.) had been ripped up. On one side, trucks fed aggregate and cement into it, and on the other, concrete was poured between the tracks and surfaced with depressions along the inner face of the railhead for flangeways.

I don't recall seeing any snow sweepers working in the winter, but wing plows were often out on the lines—thumping and bumping along the streets to clear the snow from the traffic lanes. Not so many people parked on the streets in those days, but those who did might find their autos trapped by a snowbank pushed up by the plows.

As I grew older, my traction interest began to focus on interurbans. When I was very small, in the late twenties, the family made a trip to Hopkins. As our car approached southbound on Hennepin at Lake Street, I immediately noticed it sported a real, honest-to-goodness pilot, not an ugly (in my mind) fender. Some years later, my parents recalled that I had inquired about the different sound the bigger motors made. I vaguely remember the exhilarating ride along the private right-of-way past the lakes and out to Hopkins.

Although correctly described as an "interurban" line (running between two urban centers), the Minneapolis-St. Paul line was in my opinion, way off the mark—using ordinary streetcars, running in city streets! As a youngster, St. Paul was a mysterious place with narrow streets and strange names. My first foray across the river was to ride the Mahtomedi line, and I returned many times to savor its sailing along in the open country.



A Nicollet Avenue car on the wye at 58th Street.

For me, the big yellow cars were certainly the next best thing to interurbans—they were heavy and rode well on genuine Baldwin trucks—not "maximum traction" trucks or some oddball sideframes with outside hung motors. They had real whistles and could attain a respectable 35-40 miles an hour. In retrospect, I've wondered why they went to the trouble to punch out the openings in the equalizer bars.

The question of single versus double ended cars arose fairly early in my traction fan's mind. While there were some savings in avoiding the cost and maintenance of a second set of controls, what about laying and maintaining loops and wyes and trolley frogs? Also the inflexibility of having to always run the car in the same direction. In the Twin Cities, the introduction of one-man crewing required the installation of hostling controls on the rear platform. With the increase of vehicular traffic after 1954, imagine what it would be like to stop a streetcar in rush hour traffic and back up into a wye against the flow of traffic.

Speaking of wyes and turn-backs, Minneapolis certainly made copious use of them. On the Nicollet line, there were wyes at 38th, 48th, 54th and 58th Streets.

One little scene I can remember on the wye tail tracks in winter: There was usually an area of pavement where the hot ashes shaken down from the under-floor car stove had melted the snow and ice. Also, there was a locked wooden box at the curb where coal, sand, a shovel and some rags were kept.

As a teenager I wasn't into photography—that came later. Perhaps I was like many kids in that it never occurred to me that the streetcars wouldn't be around forever. Curiously, I don't remember ever seeing anyone taking pictures. Although I was passionately interested, I didn't mention it to anybody—I worried they would wonder about my sanity. Fortunately, I outgrew that notion very soon.

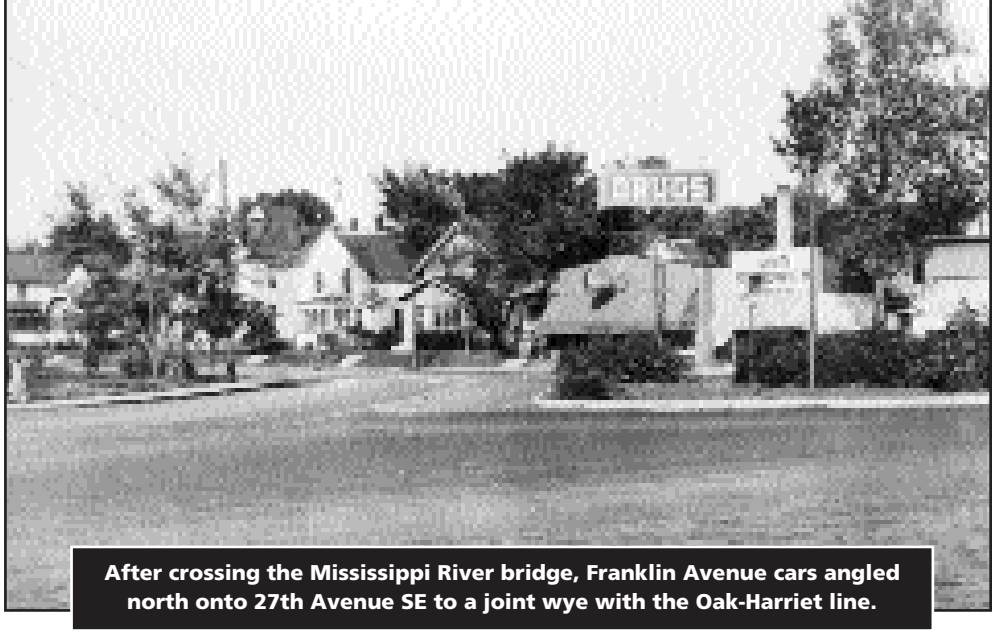
LATE TO THE GAME: POST-1920 LINE EXTENSIONS

-Aaron Isaacs

In Minnesota, streetcar ridership peaked in 1920, then began its long decline. The cause was simple—the automobile had arrived in sufficient numbers to compete. Streetcars, interurbans and short distance passenger trains all saw their ridership plummet. Before the decade was over, the remaining Twin Cities suburban trains to St. Paul Park, White Bear Lake, Stillwater and Lake Minnetonka would be gone. The TCRT Lake Minnetonka steamboats would be withdrawn and scuttled. The St. Paul Southern from St. Paul to Hastings would be abandoned, along with the Mesaba interurban that ran the length of the iron range.

In Minneapolis and St. Paul, the Twenties ushered in a building boom that added whole new neighborhoods and the two cities' combined population increased 20 percent from 615,280 to 735,962. Previously undeveloped land filled in, increasing their average population density by 9 percent in Minneapolis and 16 percent in St. Paul. The new developments were largely single family homes and most now came with garages. They held fewer residents per square mile than the older neighborhoods, and their occupants were more likely to use a car to get around. With a few exceptions, the new neighborhoods were "bedroom" communities lacking major employers or commercial activity, and those factors also limited ridership. The new extensions tended to lead development, so it would be years before they lived up to their ridership potential.

Although the trend away from transit is obvious in hindsight, it was expected that all new neighborhoods would be served by transit and there



After crossing the Mississippi River bridge, Franklin Avenue cars angled north onto 27th Avenue SE to a joint wye with the Oak-Harriet line.

was great political pressure to do so.

The governing document was TCRT's franchise to operate in each city. TCRT was not at liberty to unilaterally build streetcar lines. All extensions required city approval. Under the franchise, the city could—and did—require TCRT to build new lines. The Minneapolis franchise was updated in 1919. It specified these new lines by the end of 1920, and all were built:

1. A shortcut from north Minneapolis to downtown for Chicago-Penn-Fremont cars via Emerson Avenue N. from Broadway to Plymouth Avenue, then N. 7th Street to 1st Avenue N. to 8th Street to 2nd Avenue S. to 6th Street, to be built in 1920. When completed, the line was relocated away from Broadway and Washington Avenue N.

2. A major extension of the East 25th Street line through the Longfellow neighborhood from East 25th Street and 36th Avenue S. to 46th Street via 36th Avenue, 34th Street, 42nd Avenue, 42nd Street (later changed to 41st Street) and 46th Avenue.

3. Bloomington Avenue from 38th Street to 46th Street.

4. Across the Mississippi River on the new 3rd Avenue bridge.

5. Across the Mississippi River on the new Franklin Avenue bridge.

6. Grand Avenue from 40th Street to 48th Street.

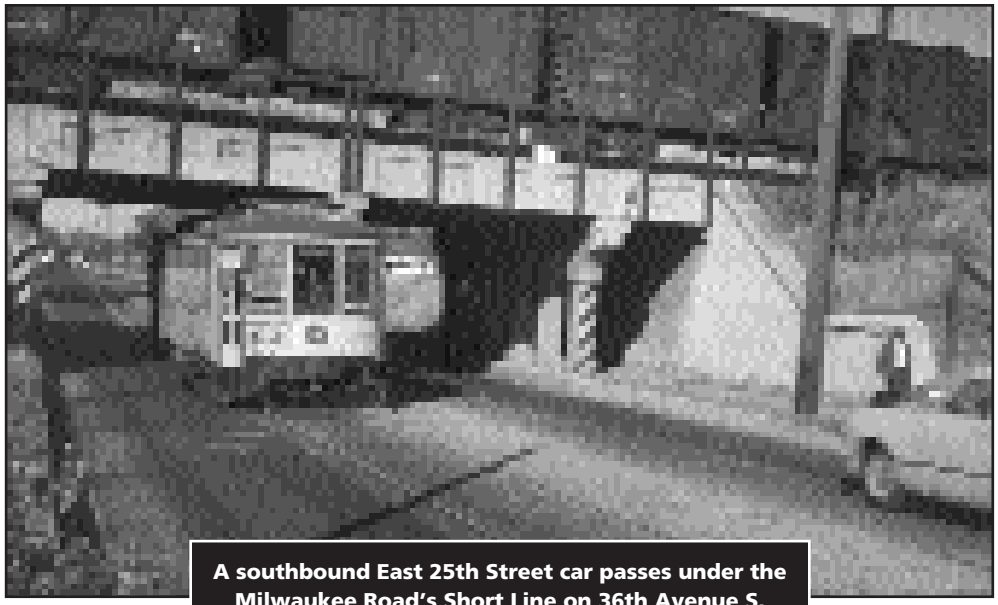
The franchise ordinance went on to list 13 other potential extensions. All were to studied by city staff to determine potential ridership and operating cost before requiring them to be built. In the end, most were built, although the actual routing sometimes changed.

We don't have a copy of the St. Paul ordinance, but it is safe to say that it was similar to Minneapolis and was also designed to expand the streetcar system into new neighborhoods.

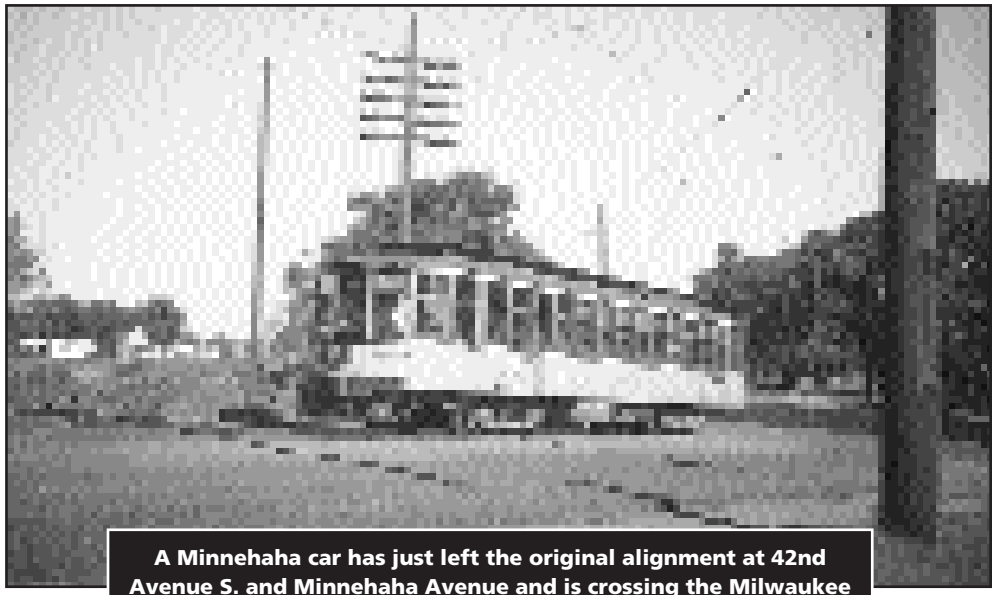
From 1920 to 1933, TCRT built 41 track extensions on 30 of its lines. The extensions totaled 102 track miles, and added 24 percent to the miles in the system. Every line in south Minneapolis was affected, as were 11 lines north of downtown Minneapolis, six lines in St. Paul. Three new Mississippi River crossings were added.

Here is the line-by-line recap of the extensions.

An East 25th Street car crosses the Ford Bridge.
Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.



A southbound East 25th Street car passes under the Milwaukee Road's Short Line on 36th Avenue S.



A Minnehaha car has just left the original alignment at 42nd Avenue S. and Minnehaha Avenue and is crossing the Milwaukee Road just north of the Minnehaha Depot. Dick Lukin photo.

Minneapolis lines
Franklin

The 1924 extension crossed the newly constructed Franklin Avenue bridge over the Mississippi River to 27th Avenue SE and Yale Street where it met the terminus of the Oak-Harriet line. It proved to be a bridge too far. The city proposed a further extension on Franklin up the hill into Prospect Park, but it was never built. The track across the bridge lasted only 16 years before the entire Franklin line was abandoned in 1940.

East 25th Street

This was by far the longest of the Twenties extensions, almost four miles from East 25th Street and 36th Avenue S. to the Ford Plant. It was accomplished in three stages from 1921 to 1927, when the Ford Parkway bridge opened. There had been no transit service in the wedged-shaped Longfellow neighborhood between the Mississippi River and Minnehaha Avenue. The new line zigzagged through the neighborhood in such a way as to minimize the walking distance for as many residents as possible. Other than a small business district at 38th Street, it was entirely residential. It did, however, serve the new Ford Plant. There it met the Randolph line from St. Paul, creating the fifth link between the two cities.

Minnehaha

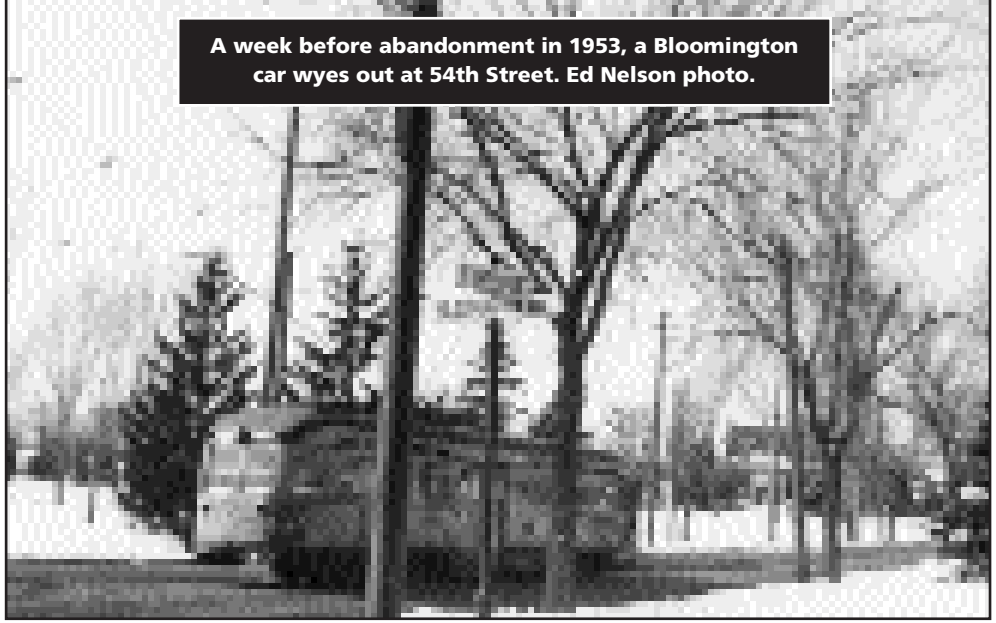
This extension, completed in 1930, was actually a detour. Previously the line to Fort Snelling had taken a direct path along Minnehaha Avenue, serving few residents. Travelling down 42nd Avenue, then east on 54th Street, the new line was centered in a new residential neighborhood. More importantly, it brought service to the new VA Hospital on 54th Street.

Until 1935, the Fort Snelling lines from each city were operated as a single through route. Even after they were separated, a wye was built on 47th Avenue, and the West 7th Street cars from St. Paul ran through to the VA.

Cedar and Bloomington

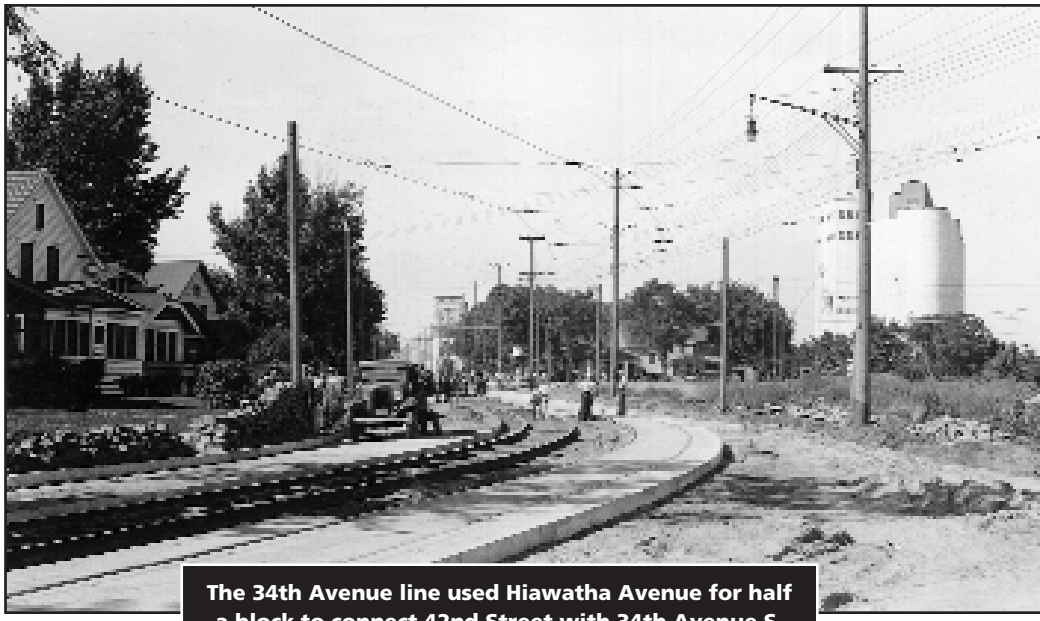
The Cedar Avenue line received its second track from 35th Street to 42nd Street in 1921. That same year the line was extended from 42nd Street to 52nd Street and west on 52nd Street to Bloomington Avenue in 1925. Creation of the 34th Avenue line in 1926 meant the Cedar line now split into three branches, on Cedar, 28th Avenue and

From April 1953 until the line was completely abandoned in November 1953, the Minnehaha line terminated at the 54th Street and 47th Avenue S. wye, opposite the VA Hospital. One car is leaving the wye as another prepares to back into it.

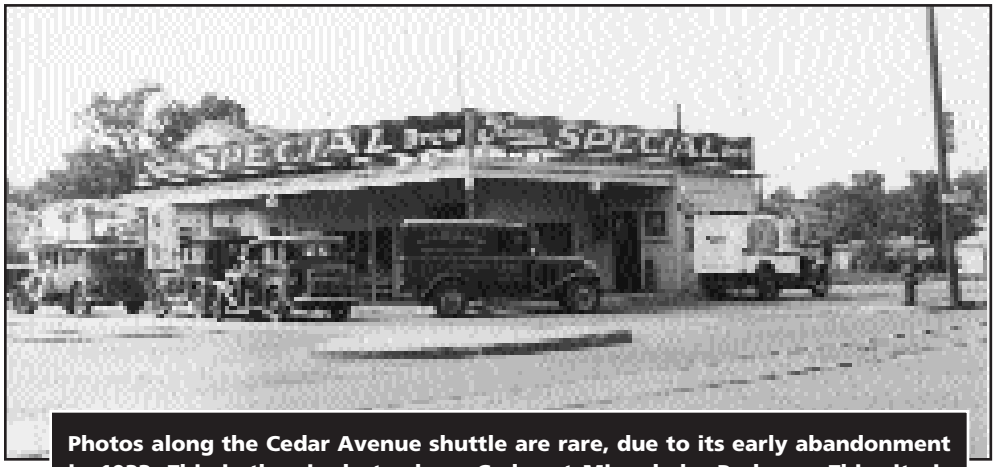


A week before abandonment in 1953, a Bloomington car wyes out at 54th Street. Ed Nelson photo.

34th Avenue. That presented TCRT with a scheduling dilemma. Running a decent frequency on the branches required too much service on the trunk portion of the route. The answer was to run the Cedar branch as a shuttle, first from 35th Street, later from 42nd Street. However, the Cedar branch had another problem. Cedar was only a quarter mile from Bloomington Avenue, one of the closest line spacings in the Twin Cities. This reduced ridership on both lines. Furthermore, the east side of Cedar Avenue south of 42nd Street was mostly park land, producing only a small amount of ridership and only in the summer months. Bloomington Avenue was more central to residential development. TCRT corrected its mistake by abandoning the Cedar Avenue shuttle south of 42nd Street and extending the Bloomington Avenue line to 54th Street. This happened in stages: 1922 from 38th to 48th Street, 1928 to 52nd Street and 1933 to 54th Street. The 1933 extension would be the last in the system until 1947.



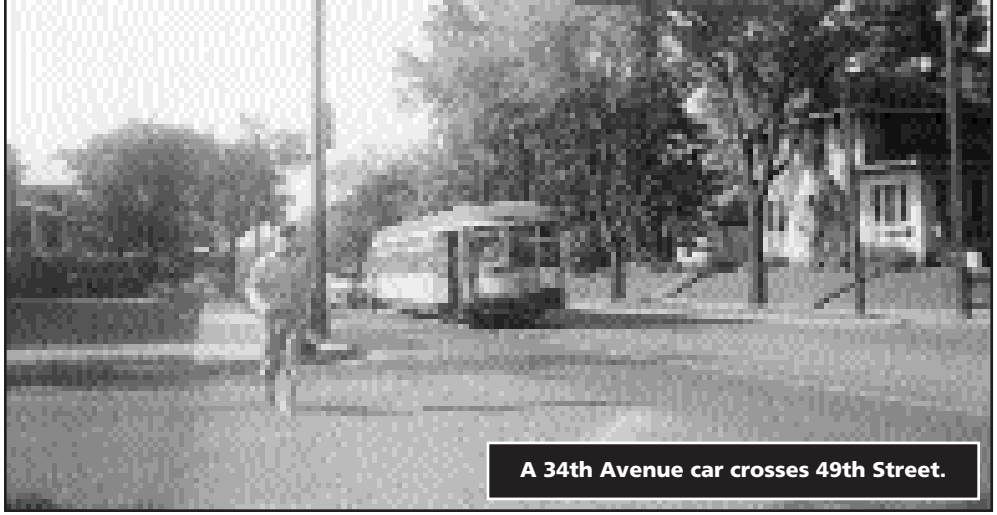
The 34th Avenue line used Hiawatha Avenue for half a block to connect 42nd Street with 34th Avenue S.



Photos along the Cedar Avenue shuttle are rare, due to its early abandonment in 1933. This is the single track on Cedar at Minnehaha Parkway. This site is now a Superamerica station.

28th Avenue

This branch of the Cedar Avenue line had been the first into the east Nokomis neighborhood, arriving in 1913. It traveled out 28th Avenue as far as 50th Street, turning east to 34th Avenue in 1914. When the 34th Avenue line was opened in 1926, the 50th Street extension from 28th Avenue to 34th Avenue was abandoned. In 1929, the line was extended out 28th Avenue to 56th Street, an all-residential area. A shuttle bus traveled south of Lake Nokomis via 57th Street to connect the end of the 28th Avenue line to the end of the Chicago Avenue line.



A 34th Avenue car crosses 49th Street.

34th Avenue

The second longest extension of the Twenties, 2.7 miles in 1926, created a new branch off the Cedar Avenue line. It extended from 42nd and Cedar east to Hiawatha Avenue, then south on 34th Avenue to 54th Street. Along with the existing 28th Avenue line and the diversion of the Minnehaha line via the VA Hospital, this created half-mile route spacing in the neighborhood east of Lake Nokomis. Like so many other extensions, it was mostly residential, with small business districts, the biggest being at 50th Street. One oddity of the extension was the intersection of 42nd Street and 28th Avenue south, where it met the pre-existing 28th Avenue line. The two lines didn't cross. Each turned at the intersection.

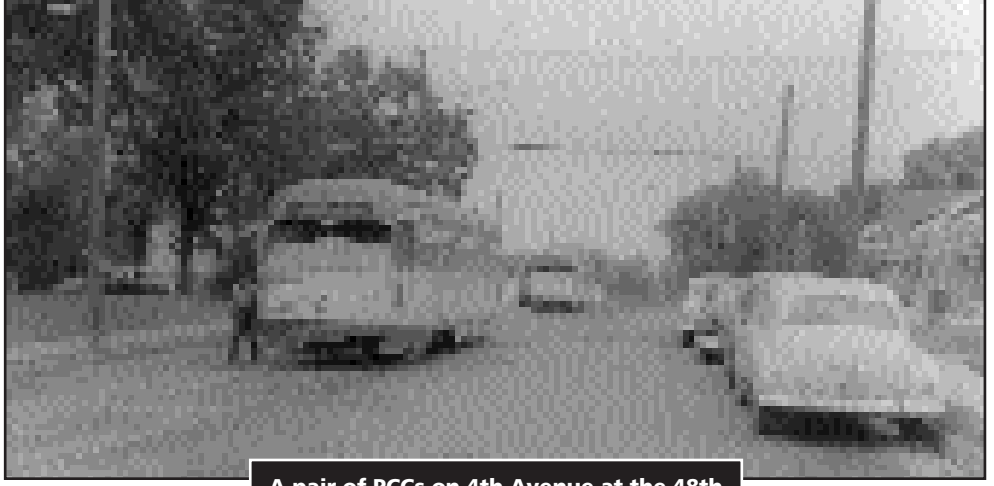
Eventually a shuttle bus was added from 54th Street out 34th Avenue to the airport at Wold-Chamberlain Field.

Chicago

Chicago Avenue reached 46th Street in 1904. In 1922 it was extended to the new business district at 48th Street, followed in 1928 by the final extension across Minnehaha Creek to 54th Street.

The 28th Avenue line was extended to 56th Street in 1929, yet this 1950 photo shows numerous vacant lots, a common problem on the later extensions. Norton & Peel photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

A Chicago car about to back into the 54th Street wye. Art Rusterholz photo.



A pair of PCCs on 4th Avenue at the 48th Street wye. C. R. Scholes collection.

4th Avenue

The 4th Avenue line has reached 38th Street in 1890. It was extended through an all-residential neighborhood to 48th Street in 1923.

Nicollet

1928 saw a half-mile extension on Nicollet from 54th Street (now Diamond Lake Road) to 58th Street.

Grand

This was another purely residential area, from 40th to 48th Street in 1923.

Bryant

Having reached 50th Street in 1911, the Bryant line was extended west on 50th to Penn Avenue and south on Penn to 54th Street in 1927, a total of 1.4 miles. The portion on Penn was one of the few pieces of single track in the system, being short enough that a car could enter and leave it before the next one was scheduled. 50th and Penn was already served by the Oak-Harriet line. Surprisingly, both lines continued to operate. If TCRT had followed the precedent of the previous year east of Lake Nokomis, it would have cut the Oak-Harriet back to the existing wye at 50th and Xerxes. This would have reduced operating cost, eliminated a service duplication and set up a further extension out Xerxes.

In 1931 the line was extended out Bryant Avenue to 56th Street, requiring a multi-charged concrete bridge to be built across Minnehaha Creek. It replaced a shuttle bus that ran out Lyndale Avenue to 58th Street. Bryant cars that traveled beyond 50th Street alternated between the Penn and Bryant branches.

Oak-Harriet

The second track was added on 50th Street from Xerxes Avenue to Penn Avenue in 1927.

Como-Harriet

A new branch was added on France Avenue from 44th Street to 54th Street in two stages—to 50th Street in 1925 and to 54th in 1929. The intersection of 50th and France was effectively downtown Edina and a worthy destination to serve. 50th Street was Highway 169 at the time.

By 1934, traffic on 50th had caused the wye there to be relocated to 51st Street.

Judging from the wheel marks and the destination sign, this derailed PCC has done a complete 180 on 4th Avenue S. at 45th Street. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

The south end of the Bryant line at 56th Street. Ed Nelson photo.

Bryn Mawr

This lightly patronized line single-track line was double-tracked in 1927 from Colfax Avenue to Oliver Avenue, then the line's terminus. In 1928 single track was extended west on Laurel Avenue from Oliver Avenue to the very end of the neighborhood at Upton Avenue in 1928. Despite these improvements, the entire line quit in 1939.

Penn-Fremont

The 1920 North 7th Street short cut to downtown saved time, reduced streetcar congestion on Washington Avenue and better aligned streetcar service with downtown development, which had moved south.

1922-23 saw a residential extension of the Penn line to 42nd and Thomas. In 1926 the Fremont line was built across 44th Avenue N. from Fremont to Oliver. Besides serving more homes, it gained a traffic generator in 1937 when the new Patrick Henry High School.

3rd Avenue Bridge

1920 saw the opening of the 3rd Avenue bridge over the Mississippi River. Previously the Hennepin Avenue bridge handled all cross-river movement on the Como-Harriet, Oak-Harriet, Johnson, Columbia Heights, Monroe and 2nd Street NE lines, plus the Anoka interurbans and deadhead movements to downtown from East Side Station. Columbia Heights and Monroe cars were shifted to the new bridge, and it offered an emergency reroute in case the Hennepin bridge was closed.

Broadway

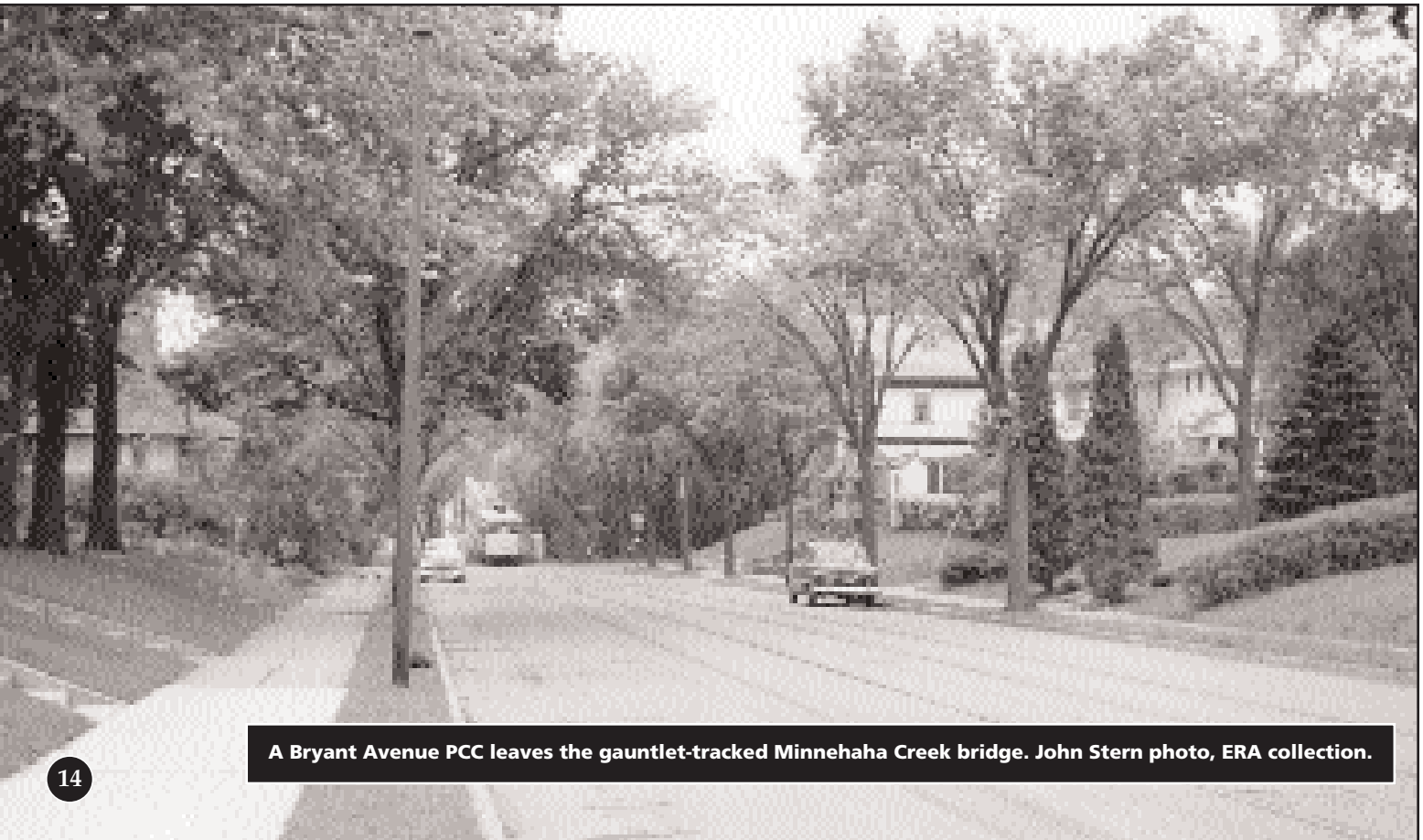
Created in 1914, the Broadway crosstown line was extended west in 1923 on 19th Avenue N. (now Golden Valley Road) to Upton Avenue. The street featured a number of walkup apartment buildings. Passengers headed downtown could transfer at Broadway and Emerson.

Robbinsdale

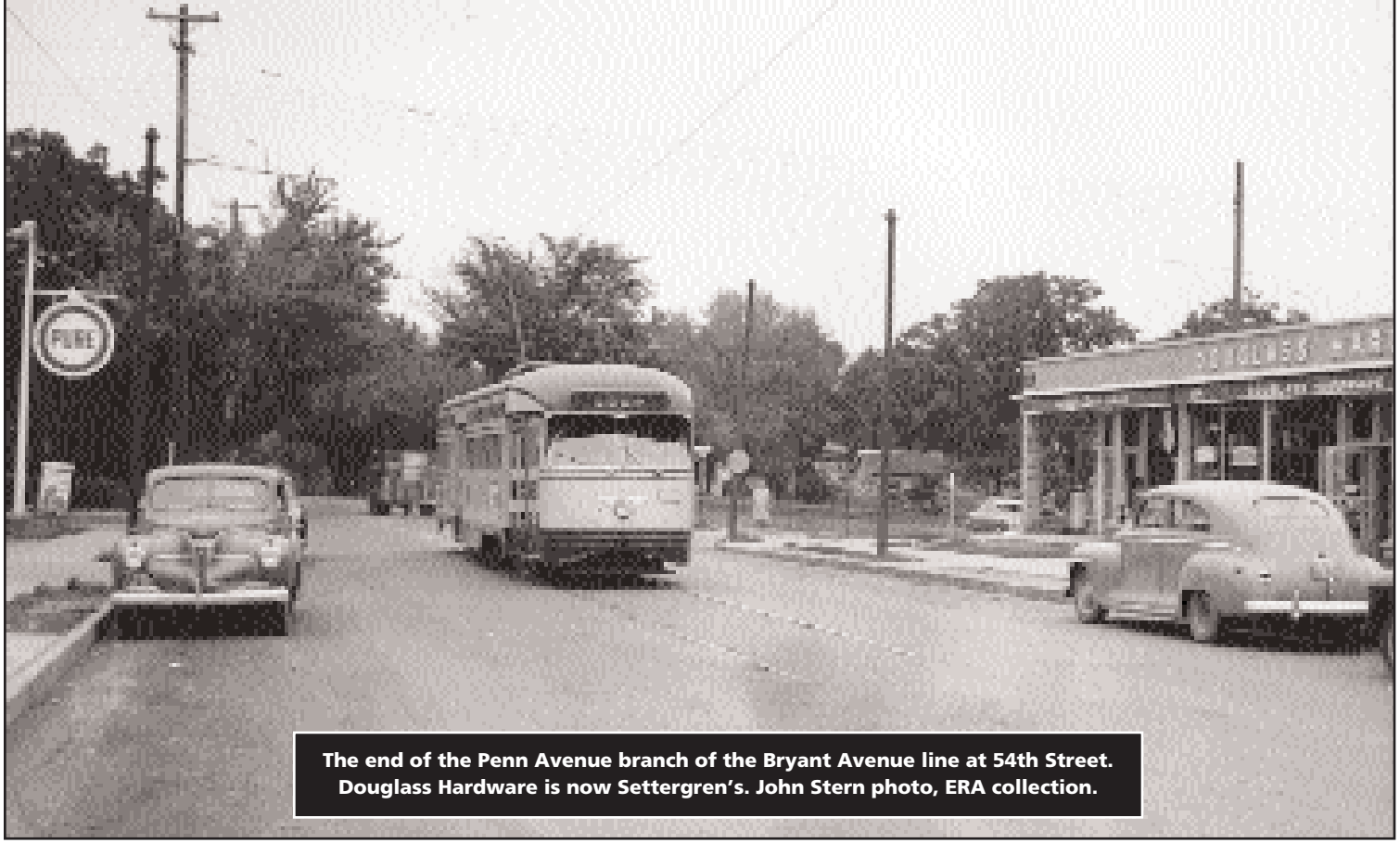
The line had been single track from Russell Avenue all the way to downtown Robbinsdale. The second track was added in 1923 from Russell to Washburn Avenue, and in 1929 to Oakdale and Ewing.

North Washington

The original Minneapolis City Workhouse was located on Lyndale Avenue at 49th Avenue N., so the streetcar was extended from Camden (42nd Avenue N.) to 49th via Lyndale in 1899. Running through mostly open country, with a grade crossing of the Soo Line mainline, TCRT chose to run this extension as a shuttle. This kept down the operating cost and prevented



A Bryant Avenue PCC leaves the gauntlet-tracked Minnehaha Creek bridge. John Stern photo, ERA collection.



The end of the Penn Avenue branch of the Bryant Avenue line at 54th Street. Douglass Hardware is now Settergren's. John Stern photo, ERA collection.

the downtown cars from experiencing train delays. Despite the lack of development, the line was pushed further north to 52nd Avenue in 1913.

The extension was off center to the neighborhood, so in 1925 TCRT abandoned it north of 45th Avenue and built new track on Bryant Avenue to 52nd Avenue, a block short of the city limits. Simultaneously, TCRT instituted a shuttle bus from the Camden streetcar loop to 52nd and Humboldt Avenue, establishing the route spacing that remains in place to this day.

Monroe

Unlike most of the Twenties extensions, those on the Monroe line served an already existing neighborhood located between the widely spaced Central Avenue and 2nd Street NE lines.

The obstacle had been a pair of railroad grade crossings. The original line reached 17th Avenue NE in 1890, a block short of a lightly used Northern line that ran along 18th Avenue. In 1923 a grade crossing was installed and the line extended to 22nd Avenue, where it met a much more formidable obstacle, the adjacent transcontinental main lines of the Northern Pacific and Great Northern. Those lines were in the process of being elevated and grade separated through northeast Minneapolis. In 1931, the last of the bridges crossed Washington Street NE and permitted the final extension of the car line to 27th Avenue NE, where the residences ended and the Soo Line Shoreham Shops began. The shops probably attracted some riders.

Johnson

The northern four blocks on Johnson Street were added in 1923, through a residential area.

North West Terminal

Unlike any of the other extensions, this was purely to serve commercial and industrial development, not residential, in 1920. The North West Terminal, which still exists, is a massive warehouse/industrial complex on the west side of Stinson Boulevard south of Broadway. Also opened in 1928 was the Cream of Wheat factory at Broadway.

St. Paul lines

Randolph

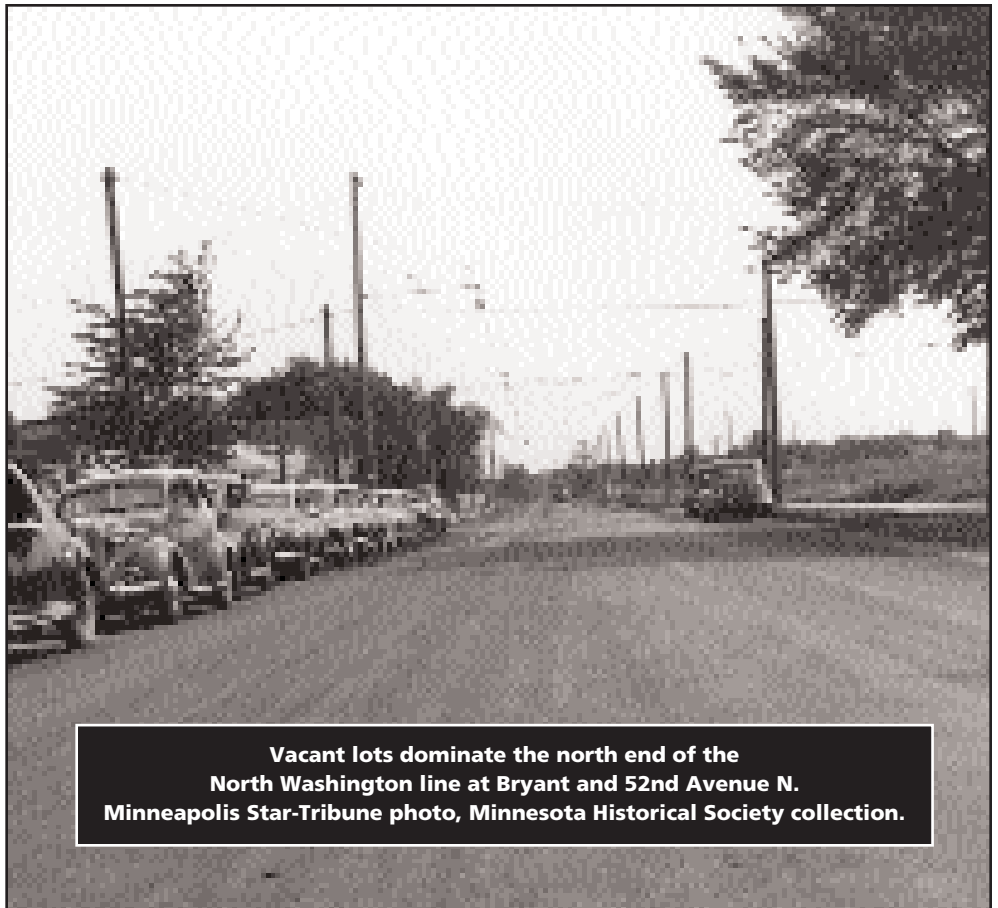
The single track on Randolph from Snelling Avenue to Cleveland Avenue was double tracked in 1923. The following year it was extended to the new Ford Plant via Cleveland Avenue and Ford Parkway, the first line to penetrate the new Highland Park neighborhood. In 1927 it was joined at the Ford Plant by the East 25th Street

The Como-Harriet's 51st and France Avenue wye. Norton & Peel photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

54th and France on the Como-Harriet line.
John Stern photo, ERA collection.

The Penn Avenue line's terminus at 42nd and Thomas Avenue N. Stephen D. Maguire photo.

In 1923 the Broadway Crosstown was extended up the hill on 19th Avenue N. (now Golden Valley Road) to Upton Avenue. Lightweights were assigned to the lightly patronized line. Car 2001 was part of the first experimental lightweight train of 1916. It and partner 2000 were the only lightweights with deck roofs.



Vacant lots dominate the north end of the
North Washington line at Bryant and 52nd Avenue N.
Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

A southbound Monroe car crosses the Northern Pacific's "Mulberry Line" on Washington Street NE at 18th Avenue. Frank Butts photo.

The end of the Johnson Street line at 33rd Avenue NE.

line across the Ford Bridge, creating a new intercity connection. At the intersection of Cleveland and Ford a large shopping area developed.

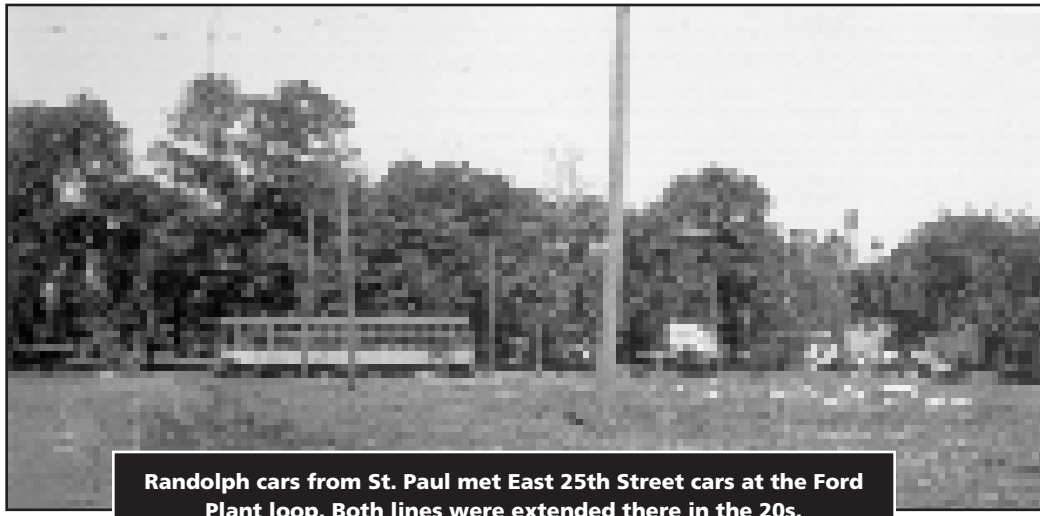
St. Clair

The last half mile of line was built from Fairview Avenue to Cleveland Avenue in 1922.

Snelling

This crosstown line was extended on both ends during the twenties. The north end used a quarter mile of existing Como-Harriet track on Como Avenue and in 1924 turned north on Pascal Street through the center of new housing that was sandwiched between

The North West Terminal line ran in the median of Stinson Boulevard from just north of East Hennepin to the wye at Broadway. That's the Cream of Wheat building at left.



Randolph cars from St. Paul met East 25th Street cars at the Ford Plant loop. Both lines were extended there in the 20s.

Como Park and the State Fair. This brought it within a short walk of Bethel College. A further extension in 1927 reach the city limits at Hamline Avenue and Hoyt Street. There it met a shuttle bus that connected the end of the Snelling line with the Dale Street line at Dale and Maryland Avenue via Hoyt.

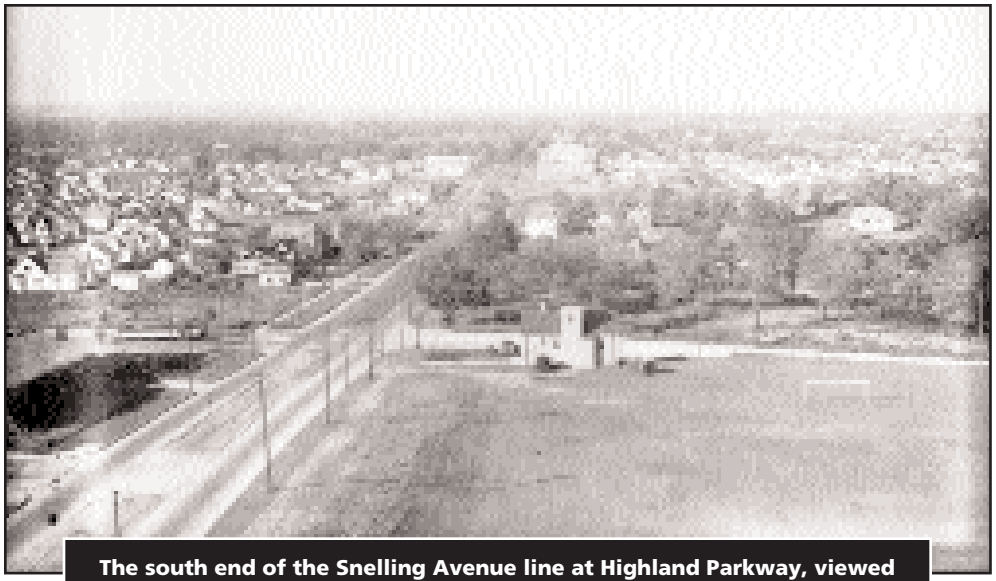
Simultaneously, a half mile was added on the south end of Snelling Avenue to Highland Parkway, where it connected with the Cleveland Avenue crosstown bus.

Dale

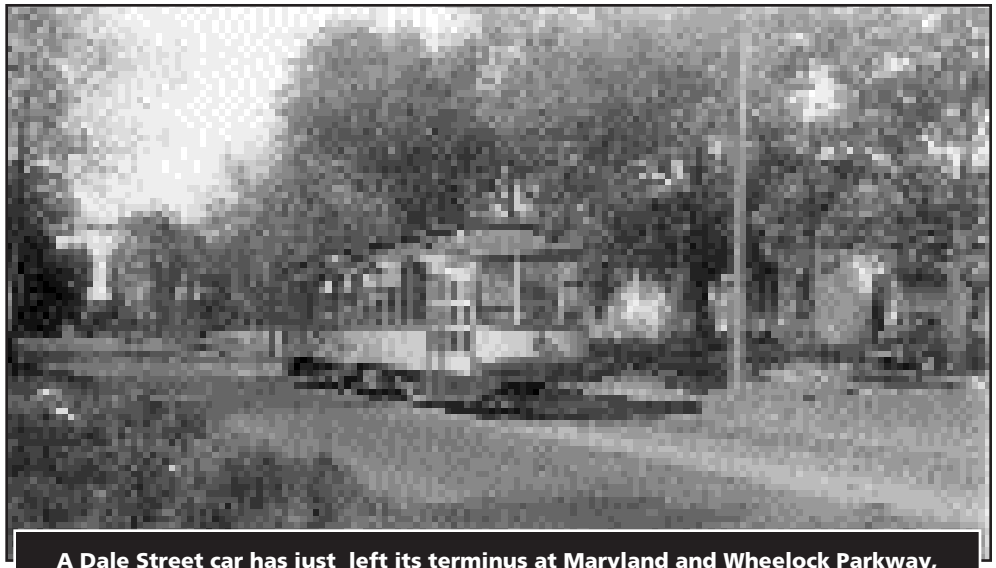
In 1923 a half mile extension was built on Maryland Avenue to the east shore of Lake Como.

Mississippi

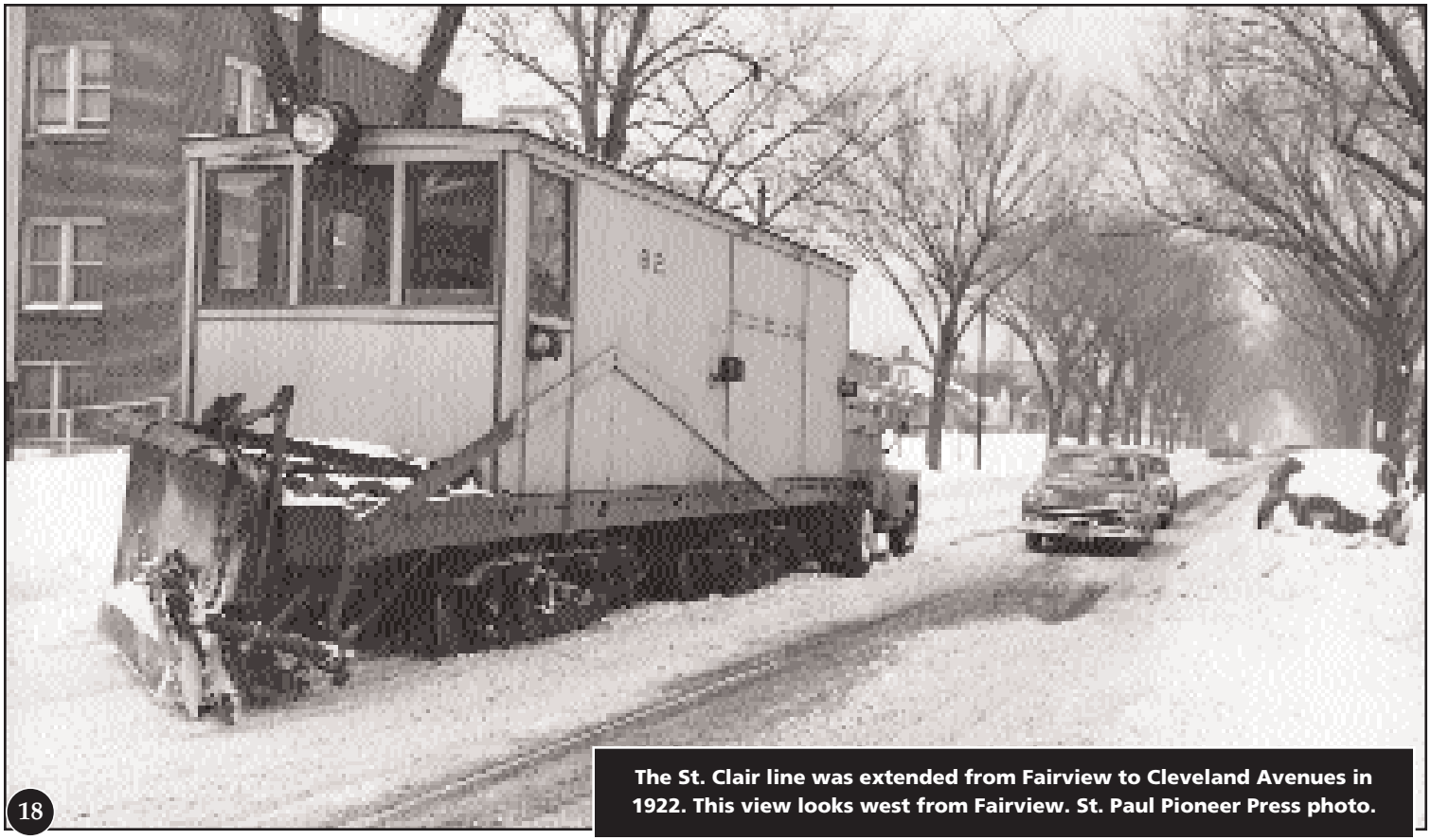
Residential expansion beyond the 1890 end of track at Edgerton and Ivy finally produced an extension to Payne and Nebraska in 1923. There it connected with another of TCRT's streetcar-to-streetcar shuttle buses. This one ran between the ends of the Mississippi and Rice Street lines via Wheelock Parkway.



The south end of the Snelling Avenue line at Highland Parkway, viewed from the Highland water tower. St. Paul Park Board collection.



A Dale Street car has just left its terminus at Maryland and Wheelock Parkway, across the street from the east side of Lake Como. William E. Moneypenney photo.



The St. Clair line was extended from Fairview to Cleveland Avenues in 1922. This view looks west from Fairview. St. Paul Pioneer Press photo.

Payne

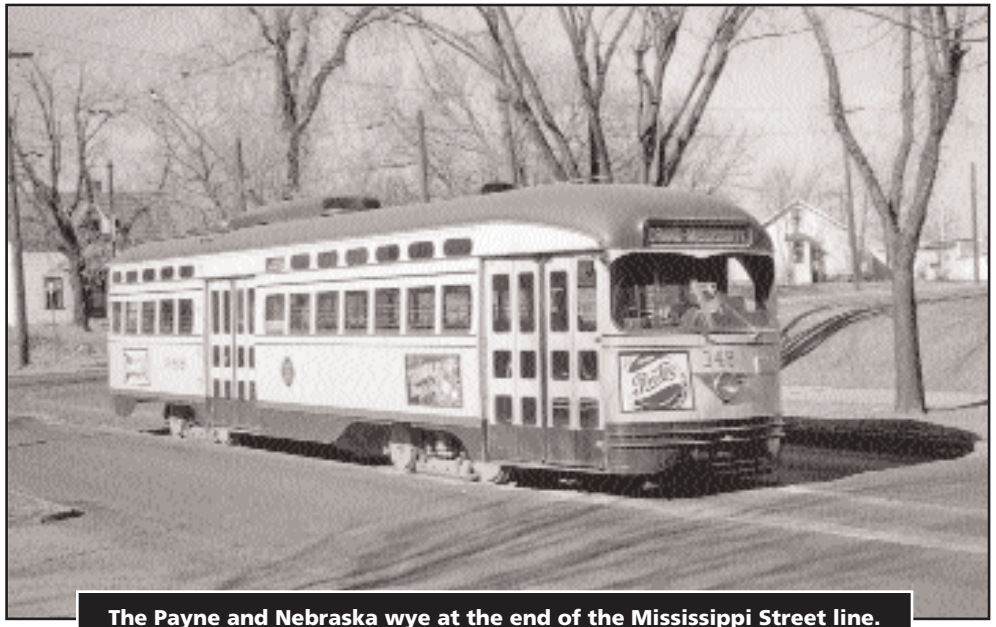
Track on East Maryland Avenue had been blocked by the St. Paul-Duluth line of the Northern Pacific. In 1927 a grade separation removed that obstacle and a single track was built for a mile on Maryland to Kennard Street.

South St. Paul

In 1927, TCRT extended service over a mile of the abandoned St. Paul Southern interurban in Inver Grove, but the business just wasn't there and the extension was abandoned in 1933.

Looking at the proposed lines in the 1919 franchise ordinance, it's interesting to see what didn't get built. The Lowry Avenue Crosstown and Lyndale Avenue N. lines were achieved using buses, not streetcars. The plan to bypass the west side of downtown via a Lyndale Avenue crosstown never happened. An extension of the Kenwood line down the west side of Lake of the Isles to 26th Street went nowhere. The ordinance called for TCRT to buy the Minneapolis, Anoka & Cuyuna Range interurban to Anoka and extend the 2nd Street NE local

The north end of the Snelling Avenue line at Hamline and Hoyt Street, the city limits between St. Paul and Falcon Heights.



The Payne and Nebraska wye at the end of the Mississippi Street line.

Headed for downtown St. Paul, a Mississippi Street car on Payne Avenue crosses Wheelock Parkway.

service over it to the city limits at 37th Avenue NE. The MA&CR stayed independent and the land near 37th remained vacant for decades, so that service never happened.

By the end of 1929, TCRT found itself hauling 33 percent fewer streetcar passengers on 18 percent more track, even though the Twin Cities had 20 percent more people. Then the Great Depression hit. Even with the economy in free fall, the city pressured TCRT into building four extensions during 1930-33.

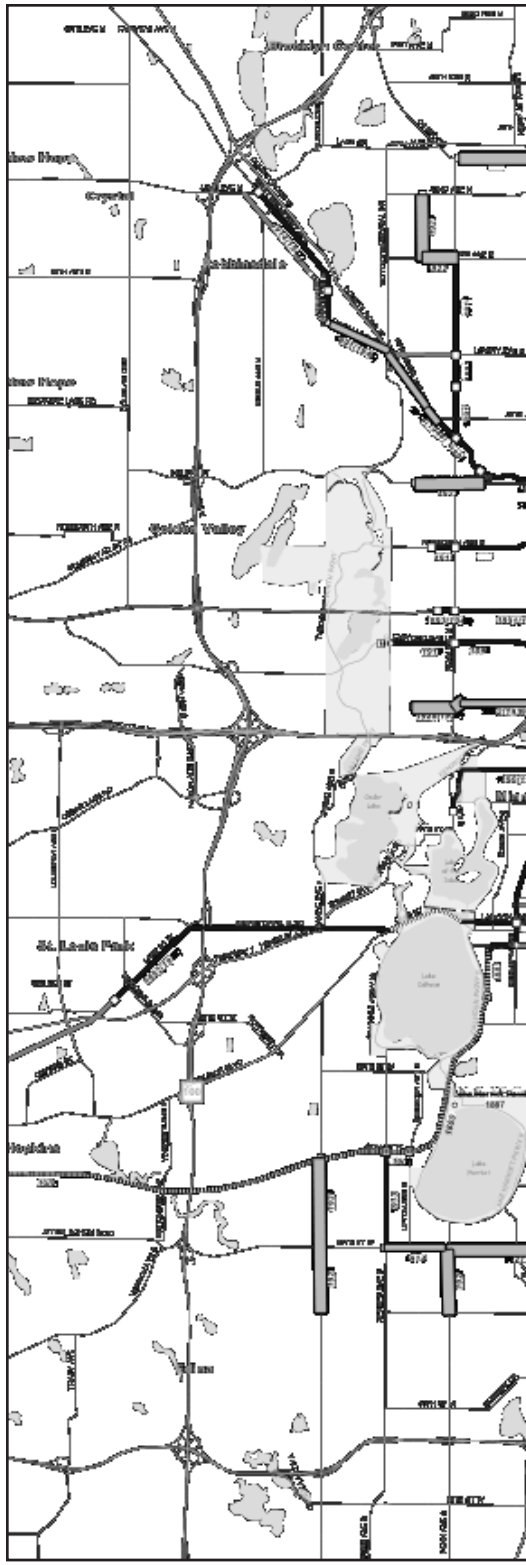
The trend of autos diverting transit ridership was universal across Minnesota, yet even two of the smaller systems saw some new construction in the 1920s. The Duluth Street Railway added the East 21st Street line in Superior in 1922, the outer end of the Kenwood line in 1924, and the Crosley line in 1926. The Concordia College line in Moorhead opened in 1923.

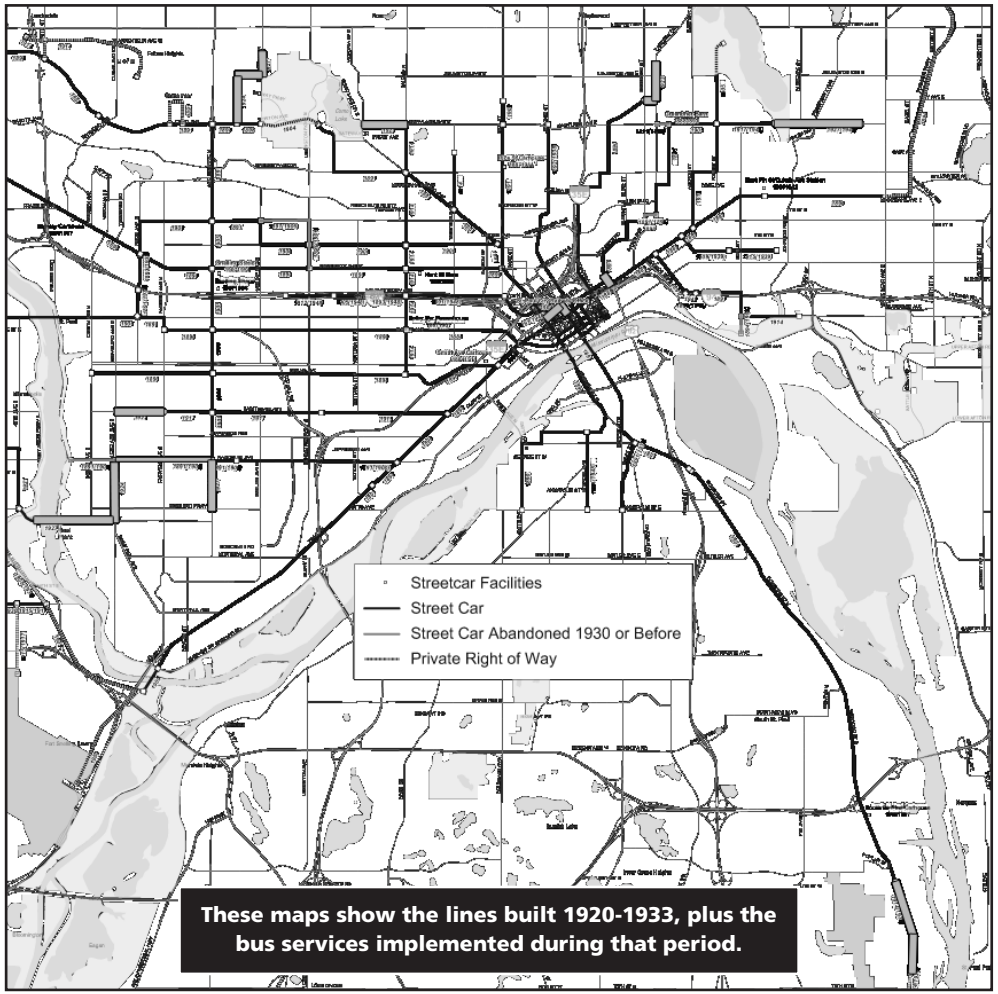
The bus line that competed with streetcars between the downtowns via University Avenue began in the early 1920s and was bought out by TCRT in 1924. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

BUSES

The loss of streetcar passengers despite growing track miles by almost a fifth wasn't the whole story. The 1920s saw TCRT become a major bus operator. This was largely due to its purchases of Twin City Motor Bus, plus the three competing express buses between Minneapolis and St. Paul. Major service improvements and acquisitions included new crosstown routes on Lowry Avenue and 38th Street, downtown-oriented trunk lines on Lyndale Avenue N. and Nicollet-Hennepin, and long suburban routes to Stillwater, White Bear Lake, South St. Paul and Glen Lake in Minnetonka.

The St. Paul Union Bus Depot occupied the small triangular block bounded by St. Peter, 5th Street, Washington Street and 6th Street. These are run by TCRT-owned Twin City Motor Bus. The one at right is headed to White Bear Lake via Highway 61. Minnesota Historical Society collection.





These maps show the lines built 1920-1933, plus the bus services implemented during that period.

Several shuttles were added that functions as extensions of streetcar lines and one of these was later replaced by streetcars.

Together, these bus improvements added 6.9 million annual new bus riders. By 1930 they constituted 4 percent of system ridership.

TCRT BUS ROUTES ADDED 1920-1931

1919 Downtown Minneapolis to 42nd & Lyndale Ave. N.via Lyndale.

1921 Camden to 30th & Grand NE shuttle

1922 Camden to 30th & Grand shuttle extended to 44th & Fremont Ave. N.

1924 Camden to 30th & Grand shuttle extended to 52nd & Humboldt Ave. N.

1924 Glen Lake-Sanitarium shuttle

1924 University Ave. Interurban express bus line acquired

1925 Selby Ave. Interurban bus line acquired

1925 Glen Lake-Minneapolis bus line acquired

1925 St. Paul-South St. Paul via West St. Paul bus line acquired

1925 St. Paul-Mahtomedi line bus line acquired

1926 Como Avenue Interurban bus line acquired

1926 Camden to 30th & Grand shuttle eliminated, still running Camden to 52nd & Humboldt

1926 38th Street Crosstown, Colfax to 34th Ave. S.

1926 Lowry Avenue Crosstown, Stinson Blvd. to Victory Dr.

1926 Nicollet-Hennepin bus downtown to 36th & Hennepin

1926 St. Paul-Stillwater via Lake Elmo first appears in schedule log

1926 St. Paul-White Bear first appears in schedule log

1927 Cedar Lake shuttle from Laurel & Oliver to 22nd & Ewing

1927 Selby-Lake bus changed to Marshall-Lake, extended to downtown Minneapolis

1927 Shuttle from 50th & Bryant Ave. S.to 58th & Lyndale

1929 38th Street Crosstown extended to 42nd Ave.

1929 West 39th Street shuttle started

1930 Local service within St. Paul added on East 6th Street-Stillwater line

1931 Lowry Crosstown extended to 36th & Washburn

1931 58th & Lyndale bus discontinued due to Bryant Ave. streetcar extension

STILLWATER STREET RAILWAY

In 1887, inventor Frank Sprague discovered the technological breakthroughs that made electric streetcars practical. His were not the first to run in Minnesota. That distinction goes to the brief and unsuccessful trials of the Van Depoele system on the Minneapolis, Lyndale & Minnetonka in downtown Minneapolis is 1885 and 1886. Sprague opened his first successful line in Richmond, Virginia during the winter of 1887-88. Word spread quickly.

The Stillwater Street Railway's North Hill and South Hill cars meet at 3rd Street and Chestnut. John Runk photo.

Minneapolis opened a Sprague-patent line in late 1889 and St. Paul followed in early 1890. They were preceded, however, by the tiny Stillwater Street Railway, which opened its first line on June 27, 1889.

It ran two lines. One connected the old state prison on North Main Street with the center of downtown at Main and Chestnut Streets. It then climbed the hill on Chestnut, turned right and climbed further on North 3rd Street to the top of the hill at Laurel Street, west on Laurel to 5th Street and north on 5th to Wilkin Street, near the north end of town. The other line began on Chestnut at the St. Croix River, and ascended to the top of the hill on the south side of town via Chestnut and then South 3rd Street, ending at Burlington and 4th Avenue S.

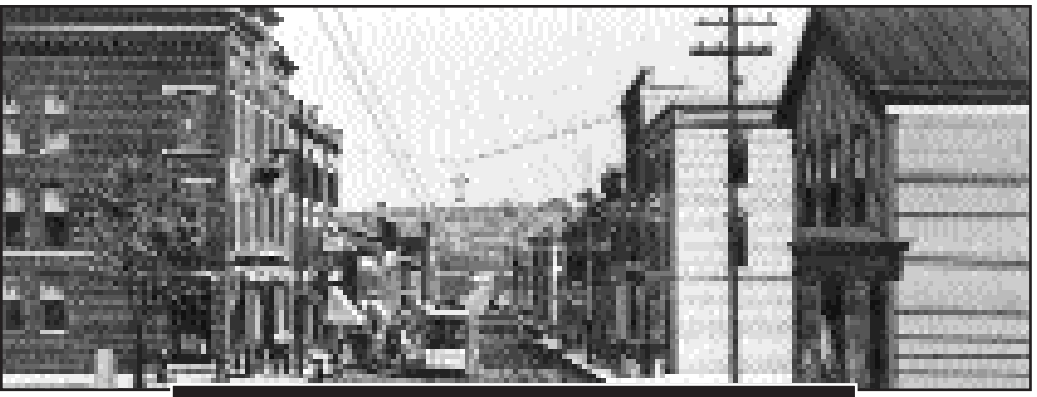
The company was ultimately unsuccessful, entering receivership twice by 1893, defaulting on its mortgage bond payments and entering foreclosure in 1894. When it last ran is unclear, but it was sold for scrap in 1897. TCRT re-entered Stillwater in 1899, rebuilt most of the Stillwater Street Railway lines and more, and offered local streetcar service until 1932, but that is another story.

In July 1889 a delegation from Winona traveled to Stillwater to view the new streetcars, and what follows is a rare account of the fledgling technology that was sweeping the nation. Winona, which had a horsecar system, didn't electrify it until 1892.

Winona Daily News
July 15, 1889

Taking a look at the new line in Stillwater

Several members of the City Council, together with some of the city officials took a trip to Stillwater yesterday on the invitation of Mr. B. H. Langley, president of the Street Railway, to look at the new electric



Because of its short existence, photos of the Stillwater Street Railway are rare. John Runk collection.

street cars in that city. The party went by the fast mail, reaching Stillwater at 3:50 and remaining some three hours. Passing along the streets the appearance of the overhead wire was first discussed. Telegraph poles are placed along the sides of the street at a distance of from 90 to 100 feet apart. A wire running across from these suspends the trolley wire over the track about eighteen feet high. The general verdict was that the appearance was no more unsightly than the numerous wires for electric light, fire alarm, telegraph and telephones that are now in Winona and that are needed for the city's business. The poles of the Stillwater line are not very uniformly set, but this can be easily remedied.

A visit was made to the engine house and car house of the line. Here instead of a large ill-smelling stable with all the cumbersome quarters for horses and their feed is a pleasant, well arranged engine house in which a Buckeye engine of 125 horse power is running. The engineer said that they use on the average 40 horse power in operating four cars, and not over 50 with six cars.

The line at Stillwater has been in operation about three weeks. President Low of the City Council informed the visitors that a local company had held the franchise for a street railway for a year or two, but had done nothing under it. Finally Dr. Allen, proprietor of the street railway in Davenport, made a proposition in company with Mr. Hewitt, a contractor and present superintendent of the line, and they two, in company with Mr. Sweeney, put in the electric railway. The public was skeptical and did not believe it would be a success.

The line running up the hill from the main business street branches off in either direction over the north and south hill. Under the courteous attention of Superintendent Hewitt the party waited for a car at the foot of the south hill, and watched the operator change the "machine" for the return trip. This was done by simply throwing forward the long iron bar which runs from the center of the car and holds a little wheel or trolley against the overhead wire, forming through the car a circuit with the ground wire laid under the rail. All the machinery is under the middle of the car.

When the car was loaded there were 44 people in it, and with a firm easy start it went up the grade at the ordinary rate of a horse car, the driver informing the party that the grade was 12 feet 3 inches and 11 feet to two blocks respectively. After striking the level ground on top of the hill the speed was increased or decreased by a simple

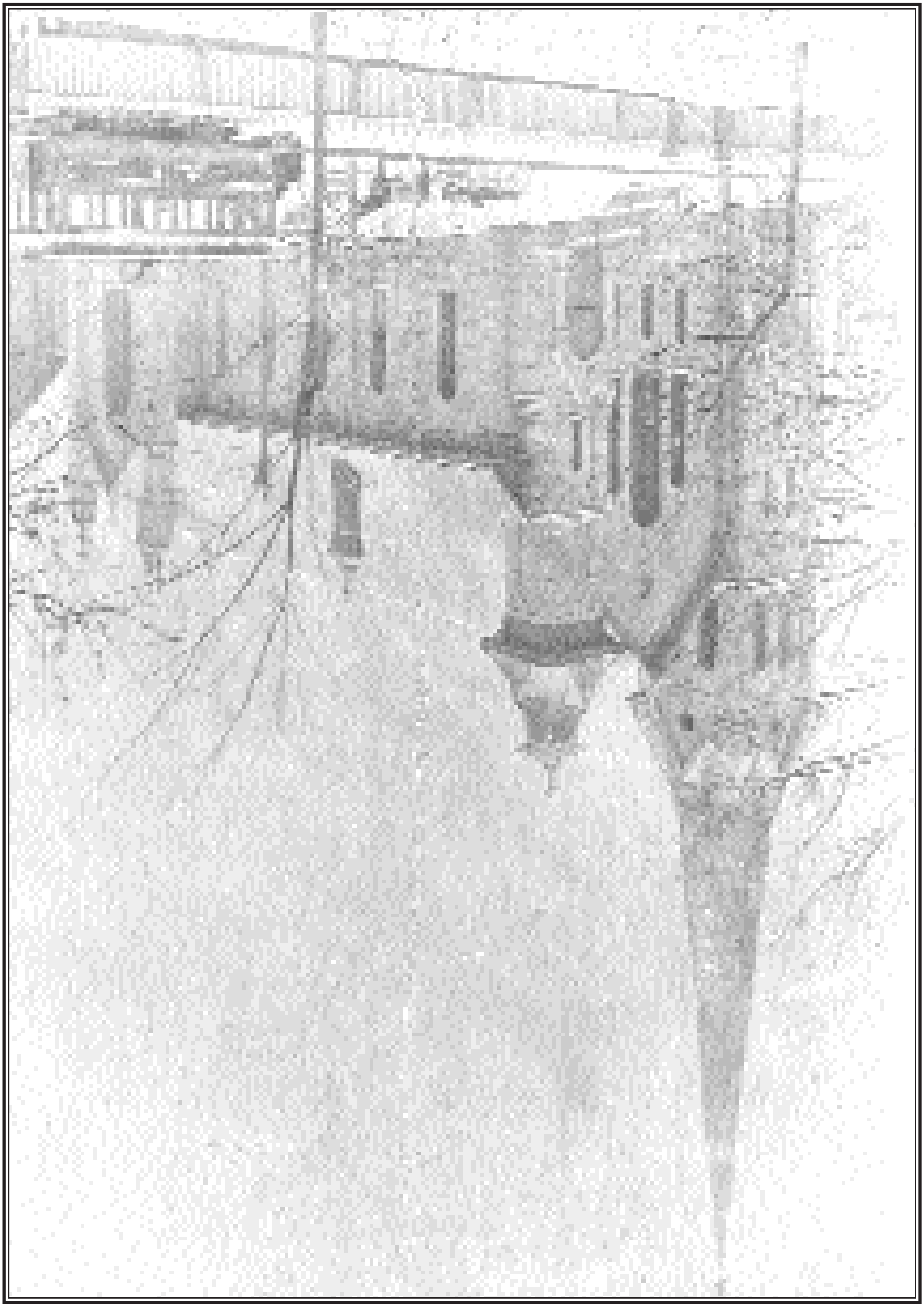
turn of a lever. The ease of stopping and starting was especially observed. On the return trip the operator speeded the car to about ten or twelve miles an hour, and the visitors were much pleased with this easy solution of the question of rapid transit.

The line is being extended to Bayport, three miles, much of the distance being through a sparsely settled neighborhood which would not pay for operating horse cars. Freedom from dust by the absence of the horses on the cars is an incidental advantage, but the great points in favor of the electric railway in which the public are chiefly concerned appear to be more rapid transit and economic management, making it for the interest of the company to accommodate citizens by an extension of the lines, and thus giving people better service for the same money. All in all, there was not an unfavorable expression heard as to the success of the electric railway. On the contrary, the verdict was that everything was in its favor as the system which is bound to supplant the horse cars.

Leaving Stillwater at 6:50 the ride along the shore of Lake St. Croix was most delightful, and indeed this remark would apply to the whole River division of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul road. The eye never wearies of the beautiful view presented by the Mississippi river and Lake Pepin.

On board the train was another striking illustration of the recent triumphs of electricity. The handsome vestibuled train is entirely lighted by the subtle agent furnished from a small engine in the front end of the baggage car, steam for the engine coming from the locomotive. The electric light is a great improvement in every way. The light is better. There is no offensive odor from the greasy or smoky lamps, and above all the danger from fire is obviated. Great are the achievements of electricity. What next surprise have the tireless inventors in store?

Rear Cover: Several months after it opened in 1889, Minnesota's first successful electric streetcar passes St. Michael's Catholic Church on South 3rd Street at Walnut Street, headed for downtown Stillwater. Minnesota Historical Society collection.



MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

PO Box 16509
Minneapolis, MN 55416-0509
www.TrolleyRide.org

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